

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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R 191235Z FEB 76

FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4111

INFO AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY DACCA

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMCONSUL BOMBAY

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMCONSUL MADRAS

C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 2510

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, IN, SA

SUBJ: INDO-SAUDI RELATIONS REMAIN CLOUDED

SUMMARY: THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
OFFICIAL OVERSEEING ARAB AFFAIRS RECENTLY DESCRIBED
INFO-SAUDI RELATIONS AS NOT VERY GOOD. BUT HE ALSO
MENTIONED THE POSSIBILITY THE SAUDIS WOULD SUPPORT THE
CONSTRUCTION OF SEVERAL HYDROELECTRIC PROJECTS IN
INDOA. THE INDIANS HAVE NAMED A NEW AMBASSADOR TO
RIYADH, A MOSLEM WITH SOME EXPERIENCE IN NEGOTIATING
LOANS. END SUMMARY.

1. COMMENTS LAST WEEK BY MEA JOINT SECRETARY FOR
WEST ASIA TO THE POLITICAL COUNSELOR HAVE REINFORCED
OUR IMPRESSION THAT INDO-SAUDI RELATIONS CONTINUE TO
DRIFT ALONG INDIFFERENTLY. THE JOINT SECRETARY DESCRIBED
DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS AS NOT VERY GOOD AND OFFERED IN
EXPLANATION THE SAUDIS' "MISCONCEPTIONS" ABOUT THE
FUNCTIONING OF INDIA'S SECULARISM. THE SAUDIS SEE
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SUCH SECULARISM AS PREJUDICIAL TO MOSLEMS, AND THEY

HAVE NOT LET US EXPLAIN HOW THINGS ACTUALLY WORK, HE COMPLAINED. THE MEA OFFICIAL SAID IT WAS "PROBABLE" THAT SAUDI ARABIA HAD SUPPORTED THE EXTREME MOSLEM ORGANIZATION JAMAAT-I-ISLAMI. ON THE OTHER HAND HE SAID THE GOI HAD NOT INDICATION THAT THE SAUDIS WERE WORKING TO ADVERSELY AFFECT INDIAN'S RELATIONS WITH OTHER ARAB STATES IN THE GULF AREA, NOR HAD DELHI FOUND THOSE STATES TO BE SIMILARLY CONCERNED ABOUT INDIA'S ATTITUDES TOWARDS IT OWN MOSLEM POPULATION.

2. AFTER NOTING THERE HAD BEEN NO OIL ACCOMMODATION WITH SAUDI ARABIA (NEW DELHI 1901) THE MEA OFFICIAL SAID THERE ARE ONGOING DISCUSSIONS ON POSSIBLE SAUDI ASSISTANCE IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF SOME ELECTRIC POWER PROJECTS IN INDIA. TIMES OF INDIA CORRESPONDENT DILIP MUKERJEE, BACK FROM A VISIT TO SAUDI ARABIA, ALSO MAKES MENTION IN A RECENT ARTICLE OF "TWO HYDROELECTRIC PROJECTS PROPOSED BY INDIA", SUGGESTING THAT "SHOULD (SAUDI) LOANS MATERIALIZE..., THIS COULD BE THE STARTING POINT OF A NEW RELATIONSHIP." ON THE OTHER HAND MUKERJEE'S APPRAISAL OF THE PROSPECTS FOR AN INDIAN ROLE IN THE SAUDI DEVELOPMENT PLANS IS RATHER PESSIMISTIC. "JUDGING FROM THE FACT THAT THE LINKAGES BETWEEN THE TWO ECONOMIES ARE FEW AND SLENDER, IT IS DIFFICULT TO ENVISAGE COOPERATION ON ANY SUBSTANTIAL SCALE." MUKERJEE NOTES THAT MOST OF INDIA'S TRADE IS IN TRADITIONAL ITEMS (RICE, SPICES AND TEXTILES) AND ALTOGETHER CONSTITUTED LESS THAN A HALF A PERCENT OF SAUDI ARABIA'S TOTAL OVERSEAS PURCHASES IN THE FIVE-YEAR PERIOD ENDING 1974-75. MUKERJEE ATTRIBUTES INDIA'S NEGLECT OF THE SAUDI MARKET TO THE FACT THAT INDIAN EXPORTERS HAVE FOUND ACCESS TO OTHER GULF MARKETS MUCH EASIER. BUT THEY ARE NOT WHOLLY TO BLAME, ACCORDING TO THE COMMENTATOR. "THE STATE TRADING CORPORATION, WHICH WAS TO SET UP AN OFFICE IN JIDDA SOON, WAS WAITING FOR MANY MONTHS FOR A VISA TO SEND A MAN THERE LAST YEAR TO PREPARE THE GROUND."

3. COMMENT--WE RECENTLY POUCHED AN AIRGRAM TO THE DEPARTMENT AND JIDDA UPDATING A SAUDI DIPLOMAT'S VIEWS
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OF THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP. OUR JANUARY 30 CONVERSATION INDICATED HIS SUSPICION OF INDIAN INTENTIONS TOWARDS BANGLADESH AND INDIAN ATTITUDES TOWARDS RIYADH HAVE NOT BEEN EASED IN RECENT MONTHS. MUKERJEE'S SOMEWHAT PARALLEL ASSESSMENT IS THAT SAUDI MISGIVINGS ABOUT INDIA'S ROLE IN BANGLADESH, INDIA'S TIES WITH MOSCOW AND THE SITUATION OF INDIAN MOSLEMS ("THANKS TO PROPAGANDA EFFORTS OF PAKISTAN AIDED AND ABETTED BY OBSCURTANTIST

ELEMENTS" IN INDIA) CONTINUE TO CLOUD BILATERAL RELATIONS.

4. THE APPOINTMENT LAST WEEK OF MANZOOR QURAISHI AS INDIA'S NEW AMBASSADOR TO RIYADH DOES NOT ON ITS FACE OFFER MUCH EVIDENCE OF A VIGOROUS NEW DRIVE BY GOI TO ALLEY SAUDI MISGIVINGS. THE FIFTY-EIGHT YEAR OLD MOSLEM HAS SPENT MOST OF THE PAST TEN YEARS IN STATE OR FEDERAL MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE JOBS, MOST RECENTLY AS ONE OF FIVE DEPARTMENT SECRETARIES IN THE MINISTRY IN DELHI. IN 1973 HE SPENT SOME TIME IN WASHINGTON TO NEGOTIATE WORLD BANK LOANS FOR AGRICULTURAL PROJECTS, EXPERIENCE HE MAY HOPE TO CAPITALIZE ON IN HIS NEW ASSIGNMENT.

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